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§ 100. **Botanical Literature.**—*Memoria botanica sobre el Embarbascar* ó sea la Pesca por Medio de Plantas Venenosas. Por A. Ernst. (Del Tomo I de los “Esbozos de Venezuela”). 8vo, pamph., pp. 16. Caracas, 1881. There has long existed among various peoples, civilized and otherwise, in all quarters of the globe, a method of catching fish by stupefying them—this result being attained by throwing into the water, plants, or parts of plants, which have been ascertained to possess a narcotizing effect upon these animals. This reprehensible practice, against which laws have been enacted in most civilized countries, is concisely expressed in the Spanish word *embarbascar*, which forms the title of an interesting botanical memoir in which Dr. Ernst has brought together all the facts that he has been able to gather on the subject.

The verb *embarbascar* is derived from the old Spanish word *Barbasco*, which in turn comes from the old Latin plant-name *Barbascum* which in modern times has been altered to *Verbascum*. It seems that several species of this genus of plants have long been used for this method of fishing, and that the seeds of one of them—*V. Thapsus*, the common mullein—were thus employed in Spain as long ago, at least, as the 14th century, when the practice was prohibited by a decree of Juan II. These poisonous properties of *Verbascum* seem not to have been known to Roman authors, or at least are not mentioned by them; but, Aristotle, among the Greeks, refers in his History of Animals to a plant called *πλόμος* as being poisonous to fishes, and states that it was employed in some places for fishing. It is interesting, from an etymological point of view, to know that this mode of fishing was expressed by the Greek verb *πλόμιζω*, which was thus used in the same sense that the Spanish employ *embarbascar*. The word *πλόμος* has been rendered by translators as *Verbascum*, and probably correctly, since, according to Sibthorp (*Flora Graeca*), *V. sinuatum* and several other species are known in Modern Greece as *πλόμος* or *φλομος*. Dioscorides likewise mentions a plant, *τιθίμαλος πλατυφυλλος*, which, he states, will kill fish when it is triturated and thrown into water. This plant, which has been identified as *Euphorbia platyphylla*, L., is still used in Europe for fishing.

Coming down to modern times we find the number of plants used for this purpose to be quite extensive. The enumeration appended to Dr. Ernst's paper embraces the names of 60 species distributed among 17 orders; but this list is by no means exhaustive, and might be largely increased by reference to works of African travel, and by an examination of Lindley's Vegetable Kingdom, wherein are given the names of a number of ichthyotoxic plants which are not found in the paper before us. One of the plants enumerated by the author, *Polygonum acre*, HBK., we should scarcely have suspected of producing narcotic effects upon any animal, but it is used, nevertheless, it seems, as a stupefacient of fishes in South America.

Dr. Ernst's paper, which, with him, we think is the first that has been written on this particular subject, forms a valuable addition to the literature of the economic uses of plants.

We acknowledge the receipt, also, from Dr. Ernst, of a copy of his work entitled

*Las Familias mas importantes del Reino Vegetal \* \* \* que estan representadas en la Flora de Venezuela*, an octavo pamphlet of 80 pages containing diagnoses of all the orders and families of the plants of Venezuela, designed chiefly for the use of the author's botanical class in the Central University, but also adapted to the wants of those who desire to acquire a knowledge of the more essential facts relating to the flora of that country.

*On the geographical Distribution of the indigenous Plants of Europe and the Northeast United States.* By Joseph F. James. From the Journal of the Cincinnati Society of Natural History, April, 1881. Dr. Gray has made us acquainted with the relations of our Atlantic flora to that of Eastern Asia; in this essay Mr. James discusses the forms common to Europe and North America. He confines himself, however, chiefly to those included in Gray's Manual. Of these, he mentions 360 identical species, and remarks that, if to these we add the closely related or representative species, we shall find that one-third of the indigenous species given in the Manual resemble European forms. He accounts for this result by their common origin in the land about the North Pole, and their southern migration at the glacial period. That some species reaching a high latitude in Europe are not found in America as far north by 20 degrees, he explains by the present climatic conditions.

*Sea Mosses*; a Collector's Guide and an Introduction to the Study of Marine Algae. By A. B. Hervey, A.M. Boston: S. E. Cassino, 1881. A small octavo of 281 pages and 20 colored plates. This book makes no claim of adding anything to the scientific knowledge of Marine Algae; but is rather intended to supply a want hitherto greatly felt in America; the want of a book of moderate price which should tell in popular language just as much about our sea-weeds as collectors and amateurs generally would wish to know. To this end all the characters used in describing the genera and the species are such as may be seen with the unaided eye, or at least with a pocket-lens of very moderate power.

This mode of studying sea-weeds may not be very scientific, nor does it pretend to be thorough, but it certainly gives pleasure and satisfaction to many persons who would never have the skill nor the patience to make the microscopic examination necessary to accurate knowledge of these plants. A lady who can prepare pretty specimens of "pink-leaf," or of "chenille" may like to know that the one is *Grinnellia Americana*, and the other *Dasya elegans*; and there is certainly no good reason why she should not be gratified.

The author of this little book has included the best known of the sea-weeds of California and Oregon, several of these being figured as well as many of the species of our Atlantic coast. These figures are taken from specimens in Mr. Hervey's collection, and most of them well represent the species intended. Mr. Hervey's account of some of the "great kelps" of the Pacific is very interesting.

With this book for an introduction, and Professor Farlow's Report for a thoroughly scientific text-book, the student of sea-weeds, in New England certainly, is well provided with literature. What he wants next is a good microscope, and, I may add, untiring patience.—D. C. E.

*Illustrations of British Fungi.* By M. C. Cooke. 8vo. Williams & Norgate, London.—This very beautiful series of colored illustrations of Agarics, which has now reached Part III, is deserving of a more extended notice than we can give it at present, but we hope before long to refer to the subject again. As a large number of the species represented is common to our own country, the work, when completed, will prove fully as valuable to American as to English botanists, and we trust that it may be liberally supported by both.

In *Hedwigia*, for July, Prof. G. Von Niessl describes seven new species of Pyrenomycetes, and Dr. Rehm reviews Century V of Mr. J. B. Ellis's "North American Fungi."

The *Revue Mycologique*, for July, contains: 'Additions to the Mycological Flora of the Department of Saône-et-Loire,' by Messrs. Lucand and Gillot; 'Fungi Helvetici Novi,' by Dr. George Winter; 'Reliquiae Mycologicae Libertianae,' by Messrs. Roumeguère and Saccardo; and a large number of extracts from other journals.

§ 101. **Proceedings of the Torrey Club.**—The regular monthly meeting of the Club was held at the Herbarium, Columbia College, Tuesday evening, June 14th, the chair, in the absence of the presiding officers, being occupied by Mr. G. W. Wright. There were eighteen members and three visitors present.

The committee on field meetings reported on the meetings held at Cranford, N. J.; West Brighton, S. I.; Newton, N. J., and Fort Lee, N. J. Nothing worthy of note was found on any of these excursions.

Mr. Gerard read a communication from Mr. H. W. Ravenel on an abnormal habit of *Asclepias amplexicaulis*, Michx.

*Specimens Exhibited*—Mr. Britton showed specimens of *Clematis ochroleuca*, Ait., from Todt Hill, S. I., having three to five-lobed leaves, and also a specimen of *Pogonia verticillata*, Nutt., having an adventitious leaf on the stem, an inch or more below the whorl at the summit. Dr. Schöny exhibited specimens of *Geaster hygrometricus*, Fr., and remarked upon the hygrometric properties of the plant. Dried specimens of various species of *Cerastium* were shown and discussed. Mr. Britton distributed specimens of *Wolffia gladiata*, collected by the late C. F. Austin.

Judge Brown remarked upon the persistency of certain foreign plants which have been introduced into the vicinity of the city in ships' ballast.

Mr. Hollick stated that he had detected, this spring, at West New Brighton, a tricotyledonous seedling of *Fagus ferruginea*. The three cotyledons were of equal size and perfectly distinct, *i. e.*, no two were united by their margins, as in the case mentioned by Dr. Masters in his work on Teratology.

Messrs. Leggett, Brown and Gerard were appointed a committee to revise the constitution and bye-laws of the Club.

Messrs. Rudkin, Schrenk and Martin were appointed a committee with power to call meetings during the summer months, if deemed advisable.

One corresponding member was elected, and one name proposed for active membership.